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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 ADDIS ABABA 002106

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SUBJECT: U.S. EFFORTS IN SUDAN "LAST HOPE" TO AVOID
IMPLOSION

Classified By: CDA Roger Meece for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

SUMMARY

¶1. (C) During an August 22 meeting with U.S. Special Envoy to Sudan Gration, Ethiopian Prime Minister Meles said the United States, efforts in Sudan were "the last hope" for a country on a near-certain path to implosion. He underscored his support for the Obama Administration's approach to creating a conducive environment for solutions through engagement. Meles outlined three main points he believed should shape the Administration's thinking about Sudan. First, only the United States could prevent the implosion in Sudan by facilitating a "civil divorce" between the North and South. Second, the North's strategic thinking revolves around maintaining its firm grip on power. Third, the South is crippled by both the inability of its leadership to make strategic decisions and by the expectation that the United States will be its caretaker. Meles closed by pleading that the U.S. leadership take advantage of the positive momentum to assist in crafting a solution in Sudan before consequences of inaction lead to repercussions from Djibouti to Dakar. End Summary.

¶2. (SBU) U.S. Special Envoy to Sudan General J. Scott Gration traveled to Addis Ababa from August 21-22, 2009 to participate in the concluding days of Darfur movement unification meetings which took place from August 18-22. At the conclusion of his stay, he met with Prime Minister Meles to brief him on the outcome of the talks and to solicit his views on the situation in Sudan.

Meles: More Hopeful Than Before

¶3. (C) Following General Gration's summary of the reunification talks, Meles opened by admitting he had given up hope of any solution to the conflict in Sudan. Ethiopia is now much more hopeful than it has been in the past four-to-five years due to the efforts of the Obama Administration and the work of General Gration. Meles underscored his support for the Administration's approach to creating a conducive environment for solutions through engagement. He called U.S. efforts in Sudan "the last hope" for a country on a near-certain path to implosion.

The U.S. Should Facilitate a "Civil Divorce"

¶4. (C) Meles stated that only the United States could prevent the implosion in Sudan by facilitating a "civil divorce" between the North and South. He admitted that he used to believe a long term status quo would have been the best option - a "Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) beyond the CPA" - but that is now out of the question. He suggested the U.S. find a way to postpone the 2011 referendum, and that this could be accomplished through legislative rather than political means. He was not worried that the South would make a unilateral declaration of independence following the referendum. Meles also emphasized that the North and South needed to engage in dialogue on post-referendum issues.

North Will Not Loosen Firm Grip on Power

¶5. (C) The North's strategic thinking revolves around maintaining its firm grip on power, according to Meles. Khartoum's assumption was that signing the CPA was the necessary price to be in the good graces of the United States. Meles emphasized the NCP's fear that that USG remains intent on regime change in Khartoum and until that fear is addressed, broader engagement will not be possible. He continued by saying that the North believed international assistance would start to flow and that it would be removed from the State Sponsors of Terrorism list.

¶6. (C) Meles said the National Congress Party (NCP) craves a

ADDIS ABAB 00002106 002 OF 003

solution with the United States to resolve the Darfur and North-South crises. He warned, however, that any solution to Darfur and the North-South crises must allow Bashir to retain power or &he will take Sudan and the region to hell.⁸ The United States, Meles recommended, should not pursue regime change, and offered former South African president Thabo Mbeki's truth and reconciliation commission as a possible way out.

¶7. (C) When General Gration queried Meles on his perception of Bashir's team, Meles cautioned that it was "unwise to 'play it' because it is too easy to make a miscalculation." He said they were arrogant, self-centered and always stayed together at all costs. They are jostling for power and money on a daily basis and Ethiopia has stopped trying to speculate on internal movements in Khartoum, Meles said.

South Crippled by Lack of Strategic Leadership

¶8. (C) Turning to the perspective of the South, Meles emphasized that Juba is crippled by the inability of its leadership to make strategic decisions. This situation has been exacerbated since the CPA was signed, and the vacuum is now bigger than before. The lack of leadership is a "fact of life that will be with us for quite some time," he added. In addition, the South harbors the expectation that the United States will be its caretaker. "The South expects the U.S. to do everything they have failed to do without chipping in anything," he lamented.

¶9. (C) Meles said Juba fully expected events to move in a "negative direction" including a referendum result of independence for the South and a destabilized North that would go to war prior to, or after, the referendum. Meles felt the South expected others to solve the situation for them and that they believed the previous U.S. Administration gave them assurances of that type. He said Ethiopia had tried to disabuse them of any such expectations of assistance from the GoE, saying Ethiopia would not do their job for them.

¶10. (C) Meles said he told the South they needed to work out

broad parameters for after the 2011 referendum, but Salva Kiir responded he did not trust the North and did not trust the CPA. Meles concluded that if there was to be a postponement of the referendum, it would have to be "imposed on the SPLM with expectations."

Sudan's Downfall Could Lead to Regional Crisis

¶11. (C) Meles reiterated several times his fear that implosion of Sudan would engulf the region. In particular, Ethiopia is worried about the wave of religious extremism emerging from a failed state. Meles added that Sudan could be ten times worse than Somalia, and that in the South, massacres might mirror those in Eastern Congo multiplied by a factor of ten. He also underscored that promises from the Bush Administration and some Congress members to President Salva Kiir have served to create a dependency in the South, which expects that the United States will provide unlimited economic and military support if it is threatened. Meles stressed that the United States must correct these expectations if they are unrealistic.

U.S. Leadership Should Build on Positive Momentum

¶12. (C) PM Meles closed by "pleading to the U.S. leadership" that it assist in fashioning a solution for Sudan that can come out of positive movement and momentum. He stressed his "deeply held fears" that if the United States fails in this effort, there is not hope for Sudan and the consequences will be felt from Djibouti to Dakar.

Participants in Prime Minister Meles Meeting

ADDIS ABAB 00002106 003 OF 003

¶13. (U) General J, Scott Gration, U.S. special Envoy to Sudan
Tim Shortley, Deputy to the Special Envoy, Office of the U.S.
Special Envoy to Sudan Miriam Estrim, Office of the U.S.
Special Envoy to Sudan Charge D'Affaires, Ambassador Roger
Meece Kathryn Pongonis, Deputy Political/Economic Counselor,
U.S. Embassy Addis Ababa, Notetaker.

¶14. (U) SE Gration's Office has cleared on this cable.
MEECE